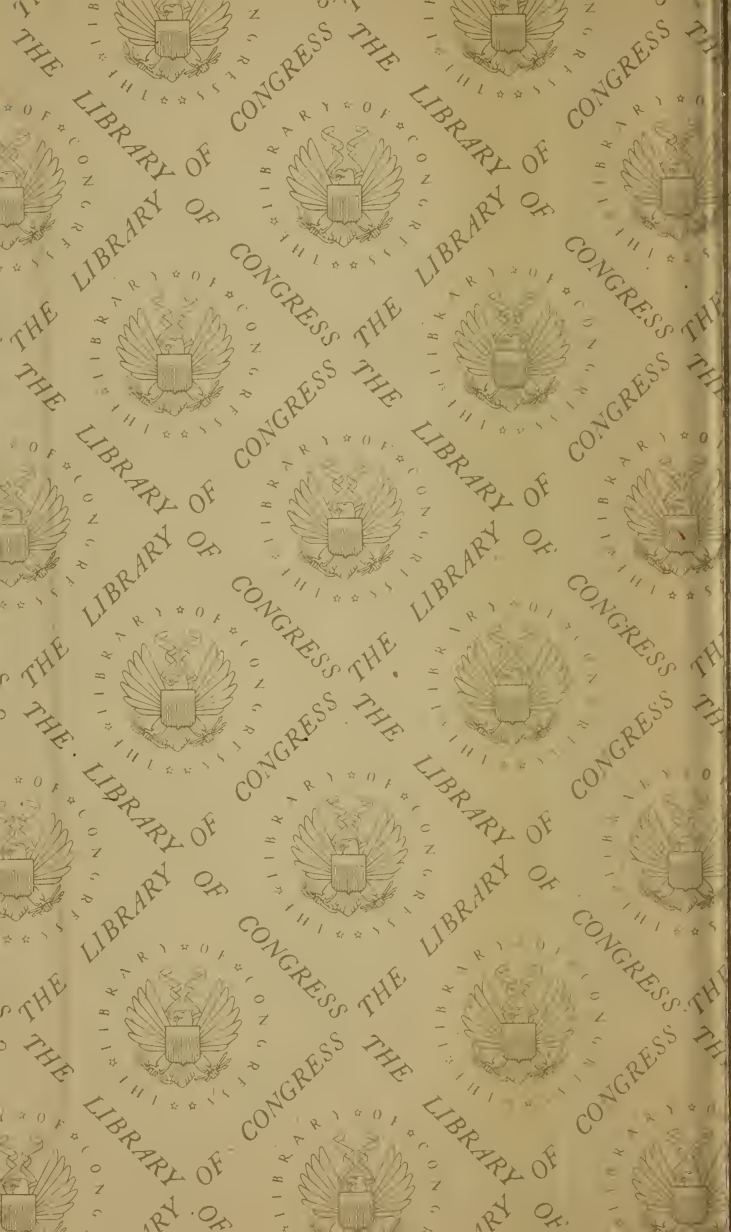
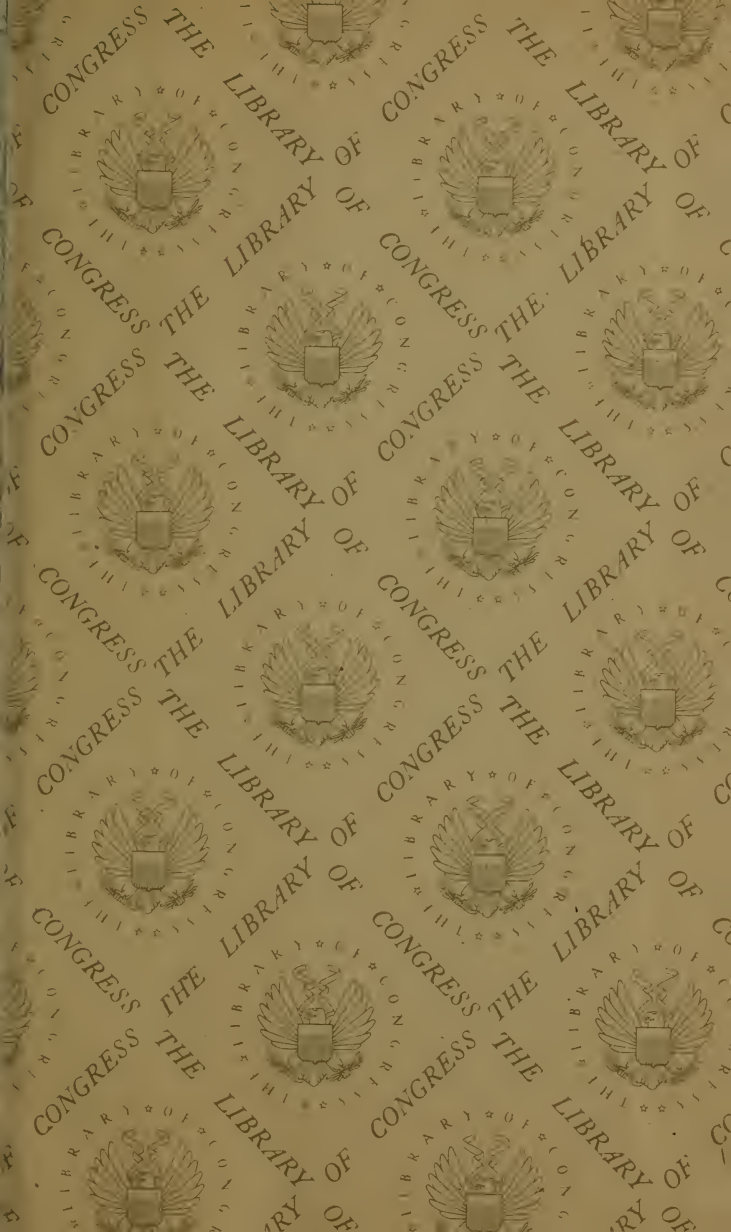


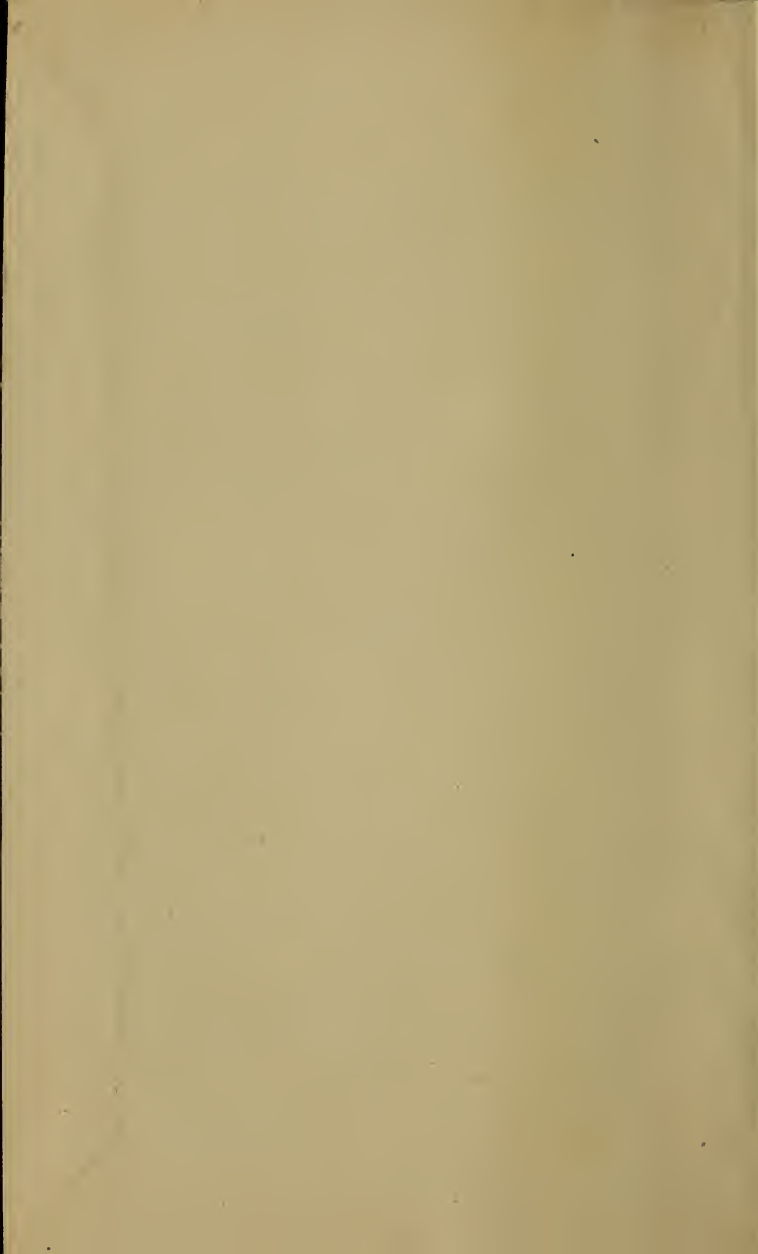
BS

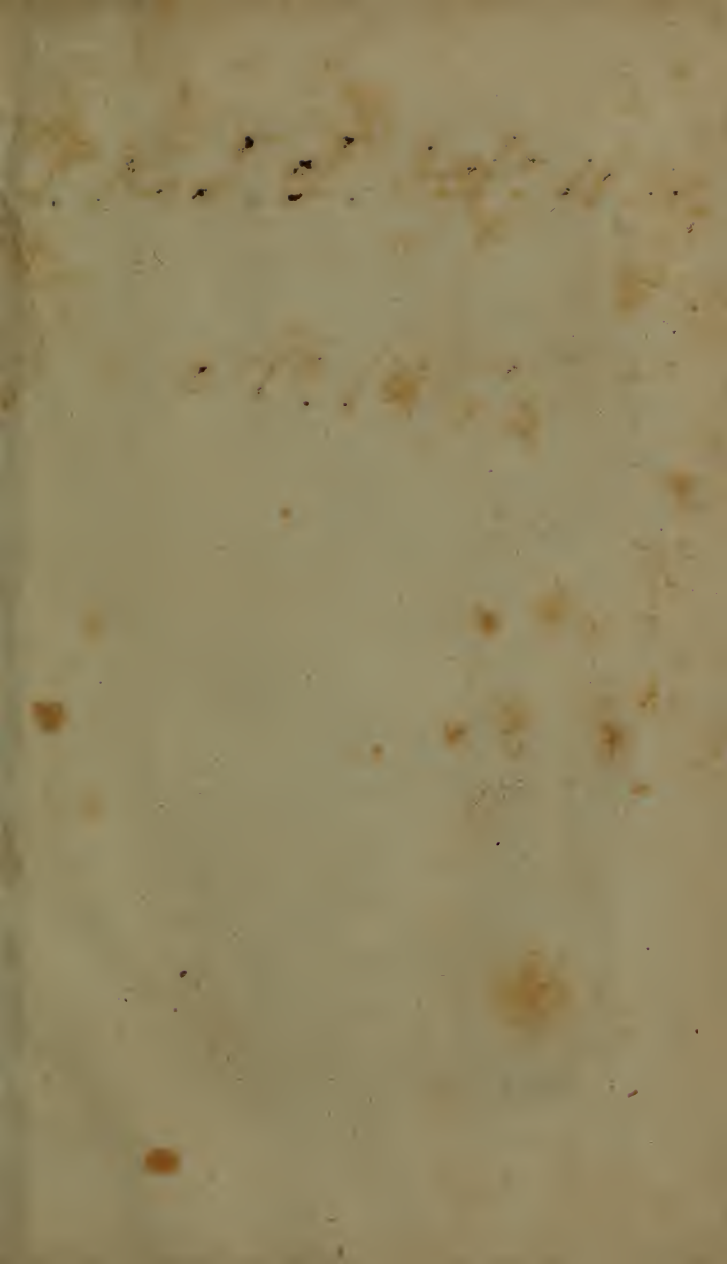
580

.E856



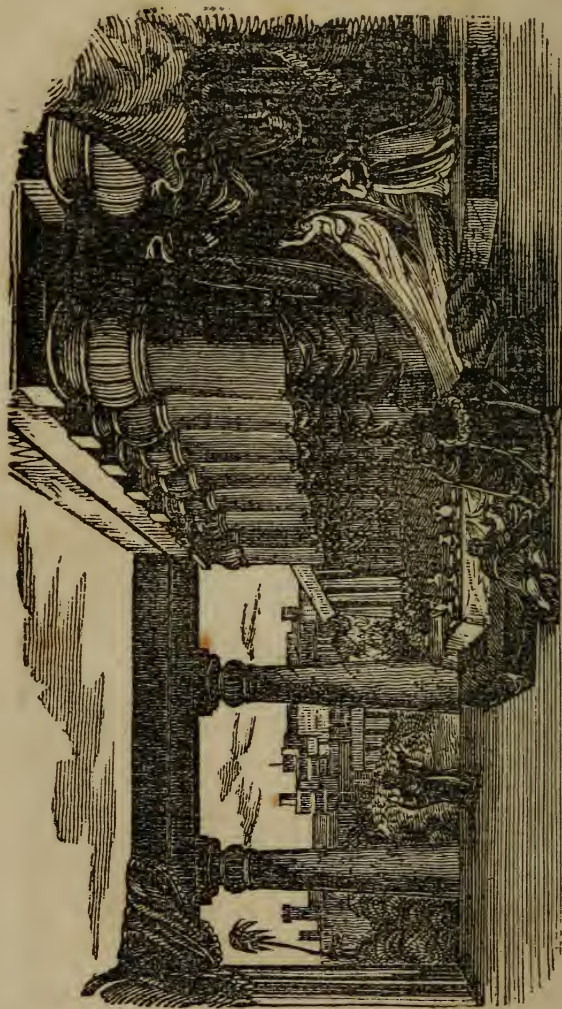












Esther.

page 2.

BANQUET OF ESTHER.

THE
LIFE OF ESTHER.

BY REV. DANIEL SMITH,
Of the N. Y. Annual Conference.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—ROMANS xi, 33.

REVISED BY THE EDITORS.

1841

NEW-YORK;

PUBLISHED BY T. MASON AND G. LANE,

or the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church,
at the Conference Office, 200 Mulberry-street.

J. Collord, Printer.

1840.

BS580

E8S6

"Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year
1840, by T. Mason and G. Lane, in the Clerk's Office
of the District Court of the Southern District of New-
York."

4235

THE
LIFE OF ESTHER.

CHAPTER I.

The Jews in exile—Scattered through the provinces of the Persian empire—Assassination of Xerxes and Darius—Ahasuerus ascends the throne—A great festival—Temperance.

THE last chapter of the second book of Kings presents us with a mournful picture. We there behold God's once favoured people relapsed into idolatry. They have forgotten the God of their fathers, forsaken his worship, and despised his prophets, and the day of their calamity has come. The noise of an advancing host is heard. The trampling of horses, the rumbling of chariots, the shouts of multitudes of archers and spearmen echo along the hills of

Judea. Nebuchadnezzar, the scourge of nations, comes at the head of his hosts, and passes through the land like a desolating tornado. The cities of Judea are laid waste, Jerusalem itself is taken, its towers are dismantled, its walls thrown down, and its magnificent temple is burned with fire.

Next we behold a long train, composed of nobles, ladies, priests, artisans, officers, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, slowly winding along the roads and defiles leading from the city of their birth. Sorrow is depicted upon every countenance; the deep drawn sighs, the falling tears, the long lingering glances which they cast toward their own pleasant, but now desolate homes, evince the deep-toned anguish of that mournful company. These captive Israelites are on their way to exile;

they are led away by the victors toward Babylon.

Years have passed away; they have reached the end of their journey, and have been distributed through different provinces of the great Babylonian empire. Nebuchadnezzar is dead, and successive monarchs have filled the throne, until Babylon itself has yielded to the arms of the Medes, and Cyrus the conqueror reigns in place of the descendants of Nebuchadnezzar.

Under this wise and equitable prince an edict is issued, permitting the Jews to return and rebuild their temple, and again sit under their own vine and fig tree in the land of their fathers. Numbers avail themselves of the privilege thus granted, and return to the sepulchres of their fathers and the undisturbed worship of their fathers' God. But many others re-

main. They have become settled and reconciled to their exile; their possessions and associations, their habits and prospects, lead them to prefer their present situation to the toils, dangers, and privations of a return to Judea.

Time rolls on; the Jews greatly multiply in the land of their exile. As merchants, artisans, or husbandmen, they are found in almost every province of the empire. In the mean time Cyrus dies, and is succeeded in the empire by successive monarchs, until, in the year before Christ 473, when Ahasuerus (called by profane historians, Artaxerxes Longimanus) ascends the throne. With his reign the detail of our history properly commences. A brief account of his introduction to the throne may therefore, with propriety, be given here.

Ahasuerus was the son of Xerxes,

one of the most cruel of tyrants and execrable of men. Xerxes had made war upon Greece, and led into that small country one of the greatest armies that ever took the field. But his army had been vanquished, his fleet nearly annihilated, and he had returned in deep disgrace. Dispirited by his ill success, he had given up all thoughts of war and conquest, and abandoned himself entirely to luxury and ease. His pleasures were now the chief objects of his thoughts, and his neglect of business and dissolute conduct soon drew upon him the contempt of his subjects. Among his chief favourites was Artabanus, the captain of his guards. This ambitious man was not slow to discover the declining credit of his master, nor wanting in disposition to employ this favourable time for an attempt to raise himself to the throne. Entering

into a conspiracy with Mithridatus, the high chamberlain of the palace, he, by his means, gained access to the king's bedchamber and murdered him in his sleep. He then went to Ahasuerus, the third son of the slaughtered monarch, and informed him of his father's death, charging it upon Darius, his eldest brother, and assigning impatience to ascend the throne as the cause of the execrable deed.

Deceived by the traitor, and alarmed for his own safety, Ahasuerus proceeded to the apartments of his brother, where, with the assistance of Artabanus and his guards, he slew the innocent and unsuspecting Darius. Artabanus now lent his aid to place Ahasuerus upon the throne, intending, as soon as his plot was matured, to add him to the number of his victims, and thus secure undisputed

sovereignty. But Ahasuerus discovered his treachery, and cut him off ere he was aware that his designs were known.

There were, however, still remaining two obstacles to his peaceable possession of the throne: the faction organized against him by Artabanus before his death, and the claims of his brother Hystaspes, governor of Bactriana. He began with the former, with whom he fought a bloody battle, in which a great number of Persian nobles lost their lives, and in which he was entirely successful. He then sent an army into Bactriana against his brother, where a battle was fought in which neither party was successful. A second army, however, proved victorious, entirely ruining his brother's cause, and leaving Ahasuerus in undisputed possession of the government.

To commemorate these successes and his acquisition of the whole Persian empire, Ahasuerus appointed a great festival to be held in the royal city of Shushan, and to continue for the term of one hundred and eighty days. The splendour of this gorgeous entertainment corresponded to the wealth and magnificence of the empire. It was held in "the court of the garden of the king's palace." Here the pavilions were covered with "white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble." The court was paved with "blue, white, and black marble," and the guests reclined on couches, whose coverings were ornamented with gold and silver embroidery. A variety of delicate meats and vegetables was served up in the most costly plate, and the guests

drank wine from cups made of gold and silver. At this great festival were seen the governors of provinces with their retinue, princes and nobles, judges and commanders with their insignia and robes of office. To these great men of his empire the king "showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty." Here was, in short, almost every thing that could strike and dazzle the senses. The eye beheld a most imposing array of wealth and splendour, the ear listened to the soft cadences of Persian music, and the palate was feasted, even to surfeiting, on the choicest delicacies.

Yet after all how deceptive was this false glitter! How many sad and weary hearts were there concealed under forced smiles! "Only conceive what a weariness it must have been to the king and his courtiers to keep

this feast so many days. What sacrifices of real comfort does the world exact from its votaries! And how much real wretchedness and desolation of heart may be found lurking in the bosoms of those 'who are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately in kings' courts.' "

One circumstance in connection with this festival is worthy of remark and commendation. There was no compulsion, nor even urging, to immoderate drinking. "The drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that every man should do according to his pleasure." Among the Greeks each guest was obliged to drink as his turn came round, or leave the company. To this vile custom there has been quite too near an approach even in our own Christian land. But, thanks

to Providence, through the *great temperance reformation* the practice of tempting men to ruin by urging them to drink is scouted from all reputable society.

“ Drink not [the poison] which thou canst not *tame*
 When once it is within thee, but before
 May'st rule it as thou list ; and pour the shame,
 Which it would pour on thee, upon the floor.
 It is most just to throw that on the ground
 Which would throw me there if I *keep the round*.
 * * * * * All kinds of ill
 Did with the liquor slide into his veins.
 The *drunkard* forfeits man ; and doth divest
 All worldly right save what he hath by *beast*.”

CHAPTER II.

Ahasuerus makes a second festival, and invites the people of Shushan at large—The queen makes another for the ladies of Shushan—Inebriation of the king—Sends for Queen Vashti—A test of character—Vashti refuses to come—A council called—The queen divorced—Regrets of the king.

AT the expiration of the feast made for the nobles and officers of the empire, Ahasuerus made an entertain-

ment of seven days' continuance for the people of Shushan at large. The queen, whose name was Vashti, likewise made a feast for the ladies of the royal city. As the women of the East never mingle with the men in public, Vashti made this feast for the Persian ladies by themselves; and while the men were in the court of the garden, the ladies were in the royal palace. The seventh day, the day on which this superb festival was to terminate, at length arrived. But "it was scarcely to be expected that a feast at which such an immense multitude had been brought together, and which had been prolonged to such a period, could end without some saddening occurrence. It was not indeed broken up by a whirlwind, like that of Job's children, nor by a fearful handwriting upon the wall of the festive room, like that of Belshaz-

zar, but it ended with disgrace to the royal family, and the guests were dismissed with something else to talk of than the magnificence of the entertainer and the honour of his excellent majesty."

Overjoyed, perhaps, at the prospect of being once more left to enjoy the luxury of a little quiet and retirement, on the last day of the feast Ahasuerus indulged too freely in drinking, and his heart became "merry with wine." While in this merry mood, the thought suddenly struck him, that as he had been exhibiting "*the honour* of his royal majesty," he would bring in the queen, and exhibit the *beauty* of her royal majesty. No sooner had the whim taken him, than he resolved to follow it. Without consulting the customs of the Persian court, or the rules of decorum, or even the delicacies of female

modesty, he gave orders to his seven principal chamberlains to go and bring in the queen.

This order furnished a decisive, though painful test of the character of Vashti. Was she vain? Here was a fine opportunity of displaying her beauty, and that, too, without reproach, for she could shield herself under the command of her royal husband. How gladly would many of those vain females who, by their *dress* and *manners*, show that they with *difficulty* refrain from overstepping the bounds of modesty, how gladly would they have availed themselves of such a pretext for exhibiting themselves. But was Vashti a woman of sense and modesty? If so, how could she consent to be led in for the purpose of exposing her beauty “to the impudent gaze of half inebriated nobles, or of a rude populace?”

The sequel shows that this brutal order, originating in the fumes of wine, had to encounter a woman whose *modesty* was only equalled by her *courage*. She well knew the absolutism of a Persian monarch, and the risk she ran by incurring his displeasure; but she estimated her virtue and honour as every female should do—above all price, and nobly refused to obey the king's unreasonable mandate. “Hail, noble woman! be thou a pattern to all thy sex on every similar occasion. Surely, every thing considered, we have few women like Vashti, for some of the highest in the land will dress, and deck themselves with the utmost splendour, even to the *selvage* of their fortunes, to exhibit themselves at balls, plays, galas, operas, and public assemblies of all kinds, that they may be seen and admired of men.”

While the king, still flushed with wine, was eagerly waiting for the appearance of his beautiful queen, the chamberlains returned with the intelligence that she refused to come. The haughty spirit of Ahasuerus took fire at this. He imagined himself insulted before his courtiers and subjects, "therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him."

Without waiting till the fumes of the wine were dissipated, or his passion had time to subside, the king immediately called a council to determine on the penalty to be inflicted upon the queen. Among his seven privy counsellors there was one named Memucan, who put himself forward as orator on the present occasion: "Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only," said he, "but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the

king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vasti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree, which he shall make, shall be published throughout

all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small."

"All this parade of enactment, declaring 'that every man should bear rule in his own house,' a truth taught both by God's law and common sense from the foundation of the world, was only made to deprive honest Vashti of her crown."

The intoxication of wine and the intoxication of passion at length subsided, and left the king at leisure to reflect on his proceedings. The whole matter underwent the review and decision of calm reason, and how different was the verdict which reason brought in, from that given by wine and passion! Ahasuerus saw that he had divorced his excellent queen for that which was her highest honour. With deep regret

he parted with his beautiful and high-minded Vashti, whom by an absurd and unalterable law he must see no more.

CHAPTER III.

A device for the cure of the king's melancholy—The fairest damsels of the empire are to be brought to Shushan, that out of them the king may select one to fill the place of Vashti—Hadassah, the Jewish orphan—Adopted by Mordecai—Character of Mordecai—Hadassah's beauty—Her character—She is selected among the number to be presented to the king—Is presented, and made queen of the empire—Her nation and relationship to Mordecai are kept secret.

THE eyes of courtiers are keen, and always on the alert. The attendants of Ahasuerus soon perceived his melancholy, and were at no loss to account for it. To divert his attention from his banished queen, they proposed that the most beautiful damsels in his dominions should be col-

lected, that out of the most agreeable of them he might select one to take the place of Vashti. The king approved of the proposal, and Hegai, his principal chamberlain, was appointed to take charge of them. According to the customs of the East, they were to be shut up twelve months, during which they made frequent use of the bath, and of odoriferous drugs, that their natural beauty might be heightened by art.

We now approach a point in which our history begins to unfold before us the wonderful designs of Divine Providence. Without for a moment countenancing the monstrous idea that God was in any way the author of the revelry in which the king's reason was drowned in wine, or of the injustice which deprived Vashti of her crown, we may see how he overruled even these events for

the promotion of his own wise designs.

Among the exiled Jews at Shushan was one named Abihail. This man had a daughter, to whom he had given the name of Hadassah. As childhood generally furnishes an index to after life, we shall not transgress the bounds of probability by supposing that those amiable and attractive traits of character for which Hadassah became so distinguished in womanhood had begun to develop themselves at an early period of her life. Like an opening bud, whose beauties are still more than half concealed, this child of promise would not fail to awaken lively anticipations in the minds of her fond parents. But alas! death entered the habitation of Abihail, and both the parents were summoned to the world of spirits. Hadassah was now an orphan.

AN ORPHAN! And is there a single chord of sympathy which is not touched by that name. *Home! father! mother!* these are the names that wake responsive echoes in the soul: these are the names around which cluster untold and unexplained endearments. But *where* is the *home* of an *orphan*? What feelings do the names of *father* and *mother* awaken in an orphan's breast? Judge, ye who have shared an orphan's lot, and lift up your hearts in thanksgiving to God, ye who are still privileged to say, My father and my mother!

But "when my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up," is the consoling language which inspiration puts into the mouths of those whom death has made parentless. And most fully was this promise fulfilled to the orphan Haddassah. She had a cousin residing

at Shushan, whose name was Mordecai. Though, like herself, an exile, he possessed every trait of a manly and noble character: wisdom, courage, prudence, decision, and energy. He was moreover pious and benevolent. In the family of this man the defenceless Hadassah found an asylum. Mordecai not only took her under his protection, but adopted her and brought her up as his own daughter. Under the fostering care of her excellent cousin, Hadassah "increased in wisdom and stature," exhibiting those qualities, both of body and mind, which give promise of future eminence. She was surpassingly beautiful in form and countenance. Her understanding was sound, her perceptions active and keen, her manners modest and discreet, and her disposition amiable and contented. She had but just arrived at the

years of womanhood, when, as already related, the divorce of Queen Vashti took place, and the order was issued for gathering the fair damsels from the different provinces. Among the young ladies selected on this occasion Hadassah was one, whether with or without her own and her guardian's consent, we are not informed. Carrying with her into the king's palace the modesty, sweetness of temper, and simplicity of manners which she had cultivated in the house of Mordecai, Hadassah soon gained the good-will of Hegai, the person to whose care she, with the other damsels, was committed. "The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him, and he gave her seven maidens which were meet to be given her out of the king's house, and he preferred her and her maidens unto

the best place of the house of the women."

When it came to the turn of any of the young women to be introduced to the king, whatever articles of dress, of whatever quality or colour, pleased them best, were to be given them. Hadassah's turn at length came to be presented, but "she required nothing," leaving it entirely to her friend Hegai to determine what he considered most graceful and becoming. She was accordingly introduced to Ahasuerus. The monarch was struck with the beauty of her person, and soon learned that, great as were her personal charms, they were surpassed by those of her mind. We need not therefore be surprised to learn, that "the king loved her above all the women, and that she obtained grace and favour in his sight, more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon

her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." Her name was changed to that of Esther.

During the whole twelve months which Esther had passed under the care of Hegai, Mordecai had shown his affectionate solicitude for her welfare, by walking every day in the court of the women's house to inquire after her health and prosperity. And now that she had been advanced to power, wealth, and honour, she did not, like many vain and upstart persons, become elated with prosperity and forget her former benefactor. She had too much good sense to become vain and arrogant, and too much piety to become ungrateful. On the contrary, though queen of the empire, she still followed Mordecai's advice, and obeyed his instructions as implicitly as when she was dependant upon him even for her daily

bread. Happy indeed are those young persons who have sense enough to know their own weakness, and self-control enough to govern themselves by the counsels of age and experience. One of the injunctions of Mordecai was, that she should not disclose her national origin, or her relationship to him, an injunction which she scrupulously obeyed. This simple incident sets off the characters of these two persons to greater advantage than a volume of encomiums. Here was a man possessing a capacity for the most exalted stations, a fact not unknown to himself. His talents, a laudable ambition to be useful, especially to his countrymen the Jews, a desire to be in a situation where he could serve the monarch who had raised his beloved Hadassah to the throne, with every prospect of success, should he sue for royal favour,

all combined to urge him forward in pursuit of office and power. He had only to say the word, and all the influence of the queen was ready to urge his promotion. But so far is he from seeking distinction, that he expressly prohibits even his relationship to Esther from being made known. The conduct of the queen is equally praiseworthy. Though doubtless burning with desire to promote the interests of her benefactor, she represses her generous feelings and yields entirely to his will.

By the virtue of unaided merit, however, Mordecai had already risen to an important situation at the court of Babylon. We are not informed concerning the precise nature of his employment, but it was one which placed him near the king's person. The palace gate was the place where the officers of court awaited the king's

orders, and accordingly we are informed, that Mordecai “sat in the king’s gate.” Here he could be near the queen, to receive communications from her, to give her advice, to know of her welfare, and watch the progress of events in the court of this great empire. In this situation he might have lived and died contented, for aught we know, had not God designed him for higher purposes.

CHAPTER IV.

A bloody device formed in the palace—Mordecai saves the king’s life—His service is recorded in the palace journal, but he receives no other reward—A new character comes forward to figure in the history—Is made minister of state—His character—Becomes an object of general adulation—Mordecai alone refuses to prostrate himself before the favourite, who is enraged, and meditates revenge.

THE lives of kings are far from being spent in quiet or safety. Pa-

laces often exhibit the most bloody tragedies. These remarks are especially true in relation to Eastern monarchies. There the monarch is generally a despot, distrusting all, and distrusted by all. Envy, jealousy, and revenge are some of the main-springs of action in those despotic courts. The monarch is surrounded with men who act the part of obsequious servants, fawning flatterers, and watchful spies. Happy indeed was Ahasuerus in having chosen a virtuous and estimable queen, but he had not been equally happy in the choice of all his favourites. There were two among the royal chamberlains, named Bigthan and Teresh. Enraged at some affront, real or fancied, or bribed into the interests of some one who had an eye upon the throne, they had conspired to murder the king. Their ready access

to Ahasuerus at all times, gave them a fair prospect of success ; but there was a secret Providence well acquainted with their dark designs, and at no loss for means to blast them. It was the same Providence that had raised Esther to the throne, and the king, in identifying his interests with this child of Providence, had drawn down the protection of Heaven upon himself. Had not Providence thwarted the conspiracy, Ahasuerus would have been the first victim, and his royal spouse probably the next.

The plot of Bigthan and Teresh was discovered by Mordecai. He lost no time in communicating it to the queen, who revealed it to the king. Inquiry was made, the whole affair came to light, and the conspirators were convicted and executed.

Thus was a crime prevented which would have filled the royal palace with

blood, thrown the city of Shushan into consternation, and the empire into disorder, and resulted in the triumph of villany over law and justice.

We should expect this remarkable deliverance to be followed by two results:—First, The avowal of the relationship between Mordecai and the queen. This certainly appeared a most favourable moment for the queen to declare her obligations to her excellent relation. Ahasuerus could not fail to rejoice in learning that the person to whom he owed his life was the relative, guardian, and protector of his queen. But Mordecai was disposed to let matters pass quietly on, as they had done. He was not seeking honour or distinction, and knowing the dire effects of inflamed envy among courtiers, he prudently resolved to keep the secret still concealed. According to

her usual custom, Esther left all to his discretion, and however much against her desire, refrained from divulging her relationship to Mordecai. But, secondly, We should suppose that Ahasuerus would be disposed, without any prompting from his queen, or any one else, to reward the faithful and invaluable services of Mordecai. But here again we are disappointed. The plot is crushed, and the conspirators executed, but the fidelity which saved the monarch's life receives no other reward than a record in the chronicles of the empire. And in these dusty records it would probably have slept until Mordecai and Ahasuerus were both asleep in their graves, had not the providence of God intended to use the record for accomplishing its own gracious designs.

Another and quite a different sort

of character now comes forward to figure in the history. There was in the court of Ahasuerus a man named Haman. He was the son of Ham-medatha, and is called an Agagite. As Agag is supposed to have been a general name for the kings of Amalek, Haman has been considered a descendant from the royal line of that nation. This man, probably, possessed a pleasing exterior, an accomplishment of no little estimation in a Persian court. He doubtless had talents also, particularly of the showy order, the very kind likely to please a monarch like Ahasuerus, whose ruling passion was vanity. Skilled in the art of flattery, and knowing well how to touch the weak points of the king's character, Haman presented himself as a candidate for royal favour under very encouraging auspices. His success was equal to

his expectations. He daily rose in the monarch's estimation, until, outstripping all his rivals, he became chief minister of state. This was an office for which he did not possess a single solid qualification: for with all his showy accomplishments he was unprincipled, proud, ambitious, crafty, and revengeful. He had, however, obtained a post where offices and honours were at his disposal, and, much as he might be despised and envied by the eagle-eyed courtiers around him, he found them ready to fawn and flatter, "to bow, and cringe, and lick the dust in his presence." Wherever the imperious favourite went he received the incense of adulation, which day by day increased his insolence. But there was still one man at the court of Ahasuerus who possessed enough of dignity and honest independence to

refuse this hypocritical adulation. He could not consent to fawn about the man who was unworthy of his esteem, much less to prostrate himself and offer that homage to man which is due only to God. This was Mordecai. Observing his conduct, his fellow-officers inquired why he did not obey the king's mandate, and pay court to the royal favourite, urging him at the same time to a compliance. But Mordecai resisted all their entreaties, and pursued the even tenor of his way. At length his refusal was whispered in the ear of Haman, together with the fact that Mordecai was a Jew. The imperious spirit of Haman at once took fire. The bitter rancour of his nation toward the Jews conspired to add fuel to the flame, and the gloomy passions of a malignant soul were summoned in council to devise a scheme of dire revenge.

CHAPTER V.

Haman determines on the extermination of the whole Jewish nation, and calls together his magicians, and lots are cast to determine on what day the plot will be most successful—He applies to the king, and obtains a decree for the slaughter of all the Jews in the empire—The city of Shushan is perplexed—Haman and the king sit down to drink together.

THE plot is at length matured. It comes forth dark and malignant as from the bosom of a fiend. "Haman had learned that Mordecai was a Jew, a name that called up the bitterest recollections in the breast of an Amalekite, and he resolves at once on the total extermination of that people." Minds which are weak and wicked are often given alike to superstition and revenge. We have seen the bloody character of the latter in the infernal plot for butchering a whole nation. We may now see the opera-

tion of the former in directing the manner of its execution. Haman calls together his diviners and magicians to find out what day will be most lucky for putting his design in execution. Lots were cast first for each month. The lot fell on the month Adar, nearly a year distant. Next they were cast for the day of the month, and fell upon the thirteenth day. And here we can discover the overruling providence of God. Nearly a whole year would be allowed for defeating the scheme of this wicked minister of state, a result plainly showing that though "the lot be cast into the lap, yet the whole disposing thereof is from the Lord," Prov. xvi, 33.

The plan was now matured, and so confident was Haman of its success, that he had fixed upon the very day for its execution before he had

even named it to the king. The favourite now approached his credulous master, and with no little art broached his subject. "There is," said he, "a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written, that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents* of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

We have already remarked two unfortunate traits in the character of

* Ten thousand talents was, at the lowest calculation, more than thirteen millions of dollars. As the Jews were an industrious and commercial people, Haman would, doubtless, have gathered much more than even this amount from the spoils.

Ahasuerus. He was credulous and excessively given to his pleasures. The former rendered him extremely open to deception, especially from such a favourite as Haman, in whom he appears to have placed unlimited confidence, and to whom he had almost given up the government of the empire. The latter rendered him quite too willing that the cares and burdens of business should fall to the lot of his minister, that he might have the more leisure for enjoyment. Supposing that Haman thoroughly understood his business, and had only the welfare of the kingdom at heart, he yielded to his proposition without the slightest investigation of the matter.

What cause have we for gratitude to God that our lives and liberties are not at the mercy of an indolent and credulous monarch, or a revengeful and unprincipled state officer! Let

us prize that constitution and those laws which secure to every citizen his property, liberty, and life.

“And what is life ?

’Tis not to stalk abroad and draw fresh air
From time to time, or gaze upon the sun :

’TIS TO BE FREE.”

The king now took his ring containing the seal of the empire from his finger, and gave it to Haman to affix to any decree he might choose to draw up for the destruction of the Jews. Overjoyed at the prospect of indulging his revenge to the full, Haman immediately summoned the royal scribes, or secretaries, and issued his bloody decree. Letters were written in the king’s name, sealed with his seal, and sent out by posts to all the governors of the different provinces commanding them “TO DESTROY, TO KILL, AND TO CAUSE TO PERISH ALL JEWS, BOTH YOUNG AND

OLD, LITTLE CHILDREN AND WOMEN, ON ONE DAY, UPON THE THIRTEENTH DAY OF THE TWELFTH MONTH, OR ADAR." That a sufficient stimulant inciting to this horrid butchery might not be wanting, the depraved but powerful principle of avarice was put in requisition. The executioners were to receive the immense booty furnished by the property of the whole Jewish nation. Such demoniacal fury can scarcely find a parallel, except in the doings of those men who framed the inquisition ; saturated the stones of its dungeons with the tears of innocence ; broiled the defenceless on gridirons ; tore their quivering sinews with heated pincers ; dislocated their joints on racks ; kindled up the flames of their *auto da fes*, and deluged France with the bloody massacre of St. Bartholomew's.

This decree fell like a thunderbolt

upon the nation. The Jews as a conquered people had quietly submitted to the laws of the kingdom. They had been treated with kindness by the wisest and best princes of the empire, and had been allowed to rebuild their temple, and re-establish their worship at Jerusalem. They were, moreover, peaceable and industrious citizens, and had become a very numerous, wealthy, and widely extended body in the Persian kingdom. "What crime had they committed? Whence originated this bloody edict? Who could be safe in a kingdom where a whole nation was to be slaughtered in a day? The king, though credulous and fond of his pleasures, had not been esteemed a cruel prince; had he all at once become a relentless tyrant? What dark storm might be expected next to burst upon the nation?" Such queries

as these would naturally arise in the minds of thinking men, and accordingly we are told that "the city of Shushan was perplexed." It found there were dark and bloody councils in the cabinet, and knew not for whose destruction the next bolt might be forged.

Haman, having despatched his messengers of death into all parts of the empire, and thus far succeeded entirely to his wishes, "sat down with the king to drink." Perhaps he feared the conscience of the monarch might smite him, and he might wish to recall his orders, and to prevent which, he intended to divert his attention and keep him drinking. Or, perhaps, flushed with the success of his plot, he sits down to enjoy his triumph and his wine together.

CHAPTER VI.

Effects produced by the publication of Haman's bloody decree—Distress of Mordecai—Message to the queen—Reply—A second message.

THE decree had now reached the different provinces and cities of the empire, and everywhere the proclamation produced its natural results. It awakened those feelings of national rancour which, though never totally annihilated in a great empire composed of different nations, usually become softened and allayed by time. It gave full scope to all the jealousy, enmity, and revenge which had grown out of private or family feuds between the Jews and their neighbours.—Every worthless person who might chance to have a quarrel with a Jew could now vent his bitter scorn, and look upon himself as a legalized murderer. On the other hand, it spread

dismay and consternation among the devoted Israelites throughout the whole empire. It extorted one universal piercing wail, for "in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes."

Amid this general lamentation there was one whose grief was unutterable. This was Mordecai. By nature a man of the keenest susceptibilities, and by principle and habit a genuine patriot, he was overwhelmed in viewing the approaching calamities of his brethren. His anguish was excited to the highest pitch by the consideration that he had been the occasion of bringing this calamity upon his people. He did not indeed repent of having refused to yield that idolatrous

homage to Haman which the haughty favourite had demanded. But still to be even innocently instrumental of the calamities of his countrymen was most painful to him. In a paroxysm of anguish he rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his loins, and with every indication of the most poignant sorrow "*cried with a loud and bitter cry.*" Unmindful of himself and all around him, he filled the streets with his wailings, and came arrayed in sackcloth to the very gates of the palace. The voice of his sorrows would doubtless have entered the palace and echoed through its festive halls had not a law existed, absurd as it was unjust, prohibiting any one from entering the king's gate clad in the robes of mourning. "Out of the king's gate had lately passed orders which had thrown the capital into perplexity, spread dismay through the

empire, and made many lie in sackcloth; but these orders must not be allowed to reflect their shadows, to disturb the gayeties they left behind, or to which they gave occasion."

Palace gates are open wide to let in the comforts and the luxuries procured by the industry and labours of subjects. But alas! how often have they been barred and bolted against the cries of those who have sought refuge from the cruelty of the oppressor!

Justice and sympathy had not, however, entirely fled from the palace of Ahasuerus. There was still one there in whose heart glowed every tender and generous emotion, one placed there by the hand of Providence on purpose to open the gate to the cry of an injured nation. Esther was there, and the news of Mordecai's grief soon reached her ear. "So

Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved." She knew Mordecai too well to suppose for one moment that the cause of his grief was trivial, and despatched a messenger with suitable apparel and a request that he would lay aside his mourning attire. But even this affectionate token of regard from his royal daughter was insufficient to afford him the least consolation.

He refused to receive it, which increased her grief and surprise. She immediately sent Hatach, her principal servant, to obtain from Mordecai an explanation of the cause of his distress. Mordecai gave him a full account of Haman's proceedings, and a copy of the decree which had been issued for the utter extermination of the Jews. He also instructed him to bear a charge from him to the queen

to go in to the king and make supplication for the lives of her people.

This message opens to our view another noble trait in the character of Mordecai. When his own interests, his wealth, honour, or advancement, are the only questions at issue, he expressly prohibits Esther from making known their relationship. But when his brethren are in danger, every other consideration gives way to patriotism, and he charges her most solemnly to go without delay and make known her kindred, and plead for their lives.

On the reception of this message the feelings of the queen can be better imagined than described. The sacred historian, with characteristic simplicity, passes by the scene, simply giving us the facts in the case, and leaving us to draw our own inferences. Esther again despatched her faithful

messenger to Mordecai with an accurate account of her situation. She informed him that a law existed forbidding any man or woman, without exception, to enter uncalled into the inner court of the palace. Unless the monarch was pleased to hold out the golden sceptre as a token of his pardon, death was the certain penalty.

The Persian monarchs affected the highest majesty, even to the assuming of divine honours. Their absurd laws shut them out from intercourse with their subjects, and closed up almost every avenue of justice. Every species of information that they received was communicated by a few chief favourites, who, under pretence of the most profound respect and obedience, contrived to engross the government almost entirely to themselves. The favourite might oppress with impunity,

well knowing that every petition or remonstrance from aggrieved innocence must pass through his hands, or those of some of his minions, ere it would be likely to reach the throne.

But besides this difficulty, the queen had still another to encounter. Either Haman had by his spies obtained some knowledge of her intercourse with Mordecai, and had been endeavouring to draw the king's attentions and affections from her, or from some other cause he had not sent for her, nor had she seen him for the last thirty days. Here then was difficulty heaped upon difficulty. First, she had the power and influence of Haman to contend against. Secondly, the pride of the monarch would be adverse to her cause, and the custom of the nation positively forbade the repeal of any law once passed. Thirdly, the petition for a repeal could not even

be made without endangering the life of the petitioner. Fourthly, the queen had not been called into the king's presence during the last thirty days, and had reason to fear that all was not well. All this she made known to Mordecai.

And what will Mordecai do now? What reply will he make to this cheerless message? Surely the storm gathers, dangers and difficulties seem marshalling themselves on every hand for the onset, and scarce a ray of light breaks through the surrounding gloom from any quarter. But great difficulties call out the energies of great minds. Mordecai has no thought of either flying from the impending storm, or sinking down to die beneath its fury. And as he shrinks not from the danger himself, so he is ready to expose one dearer to him than life, his own beloved Esther. He returns

a message in words that burn—one appealing to every virtuous, pious, and patriotic feeling of her heart, and calculated to fire her soul to deeds of heroic valour. He first, with equal wisdom and justice, shows Esther that she is called upon *to act for her own personal safety*. Though queen of the empire, she was a Jewess, and as fully embraced in the terrible edict as the most obscure Israelite in the whole realm. And what if this had been kept secret, there were doubtless many who knew it. Or, if indeed there were not, could she remain tranquil when the awful day should arrive, and the blood of the whole nation be flowing around her? Would not her terrors become informers against her? The purport of this part of Mordecai's appeal is this: "I can fully appreciate all the difficulties you have named. They are indeed

many and appalling. I will even allow it to be quite possible you may lose your life in attempting to save your nation. But suppose even that you do. Is it not even now devoted to destruction? Is there not a decree already passed dooming to death ALL JEWS, LITTLE CHILDREN AND WOMEN? And would it not be more noble and praiseworthy to perish in attempting to save your people than to sit still, and after all perish with them?"

But Mordecai does not end his appeal here: he goes on. But "if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." As though he had said, "God's people will surely be delivered. This murderous edict will never be executed. God has not wrought

so many wonders in favour of Israel to bring them to such an end. He will vindicate his own honour. He who made the waters of the Red Sea to stand as a wall, who opened for his people a passage in the depths, who fed them on manna in the wilderness, who gave them, even in captivity, favour in the eyes of Cyrus and all his successors—*He* will never suffer them to perish under the hand of a persecuting Amalekite. No: Israel shall be delivered. And now, behold thy glorious opportunity. May not my beloved Esther be the honoured instrument in this great salvation? May not her name in after ages be ranked with the worthies of Israel? And will she let such an opportunity pass unimproved? Shall it be said by future generations, that a Jewess wore the crown of Persia, and yet would have allowed her whole nation

to perish under a sanguinary edict without even asking its repeal from her own husband? Would not that Providence which shall save Israel visit sore judgment upon the head of such a recreant descendant of Abraham? Would not the day of Israel's deliverance be the day of thy destruction, and thy name and thy father's house be blotted out before the Lord? But I have already gone too far. Do not for a moment suppose that I think Hadassah capable of such cowardice. So far from it, I already view her as the chosen instrument of God to accomplish his merciful designs. I have seen her raised from a helpless orphan, an orphan exile, to the throne of Persia, and for what? Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Providence points the way, go forward, be courageous, be strong.

Heaven shall smile upon thy effort, and henceforth 'all generations shall call thee blessed.'”

CHAPTER VIII.

Pride of the Persian monarchs—Inaccessible to their subjects—Esther is resolved to rescue her people, or perish in the attempt—God's throne always accessible—Heroic character of woman—A fast—Esther ventures into the presence of the king—Ahasuerus holds out the golden sceptre—The queen invites him and Haman to her banquet—Invitation to a second banquet—Haman meets Mordecai, who still refuses to prostrate himself—Goes home in a rage—A council—A gallows erected for Mordecai.

WISHING to be regarded by their subjects as a species of divinity, and to receive from them a kind of divine homage, the Persian monarchs withdrew from their subjects, and hedged up the way to the throne by the fearful penalty of death. To reach the presence of Ahasuerus,

Esther had this dread penalty of Persian law to encounter. She knew not but the monarch who had deprived one queen of her crown for refusing to come into his presence when called, might deprive another of life for venturing there uncalled. But she knew of one King who had not, like Ahasuerus, barred his subjects from his presence. This was the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. She had deliberated upon her duty in the present trying emergency, had counselled with Mordecai, and had now resolved. Her mind was fixed upon rescuing her people, or perishing in the attempt. But as she had not formed her purpose in any fit of enthusiasm, so she did not enter upon its execution rashly. Knowing that "the hearts of kings are in the hands of the Lord, and that he turneth them as the rivers of water whi-

thersoever he will," her first appeal was to his ever accessible throne. But she went not alone. The Jews as a people had sinned, or God would never have allowed such an impending storm to gather over them. It was needful they should repent and humble themselves in this day of rebuke and calamity. Again, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." There were doubtless many righteous Jews in the royal city. The queen therefore sent to Mordecai, saying, "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink, three days, night nor day; I also and my maidens* will fast likewise,† and so

* Her maidens were probably of the Jewish nation, or proselytes, or if not, were so strongly attached to this excellent lady, as to be willing to do any thing she directed.

† It is not likely the queen literally abstained

will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH."

Here is female heroism, here is woman in her true character. Formed by the God of nature to watch over the human race in the helpless period of existence, yet knowing her success depends more on skill than strength, woman is ordinarily characterized by her watchful solicitude to anticipate and avoid danger. With a keen eye she sees the coming evil in the distance, and avoids the encounter, or with art and dexterity she slips aside at its approach. But behind all these qualities there lies a courage undaunted, a fortitude unshaken, an energy and a perseverance

from all food for three days, as this would have prostrated her strength, and unnerved her for her approaching trial ; but the fast she advised and kept herself was like that of Daniel, who ate no *pleasant food*, nor any, except in very *small quantities*.

unequalled. When these are once fairly aroused, the frailer sex often becomes the stronger, and woman comes forward into the foremost ranks to face difficulty and danger. "If I perish, I *perish*," is the language of *her deeds*, as well as of her lips.

The message of the queen to Mordecai was like the silver light which streaks the east after a night of darkness. Though small and feeble its gleams, it is the presage of coming day. He hailed it as the harbinger of morn, after a night of tempests and blackness. With a cheerful courage he went and called the Jews together to implore the blessing of God upon the queen's adventure into the royal presence. They fasted, they humbled themselves before the Lord, and earnestly sought his favour.

The third day at length arrived.

To appear with becoming dignity, the queen laid aside her robes of mourning, and, putting on her royal apparel, entered the presence chamber of Ahasuerus. The king saw her, and held out the golden sceptre in token of his pleasure at her approach, and his readiness to grant her request. She approached and touched the top of it as an evidence of her gratitude and submission. "What wilt thou, Queen Esther?" said the king, "and what is thy request? It shall be given thee, to the half of the kingdom." To endear herself the more to the king, and better dispose him to grant her request, Esther delayed presenting her petition for the present. Her only request now is, "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet which I have prepared for him."

He replied, "Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said," so the king and Haman went in to the banquet. And the king said to Esther at the banquet of wine, "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed." To engage still farther the king's affections by a second entertainment, and to intimate to him that her petition was one of more than ordinary importance, she replied, "My petition, and my request is, If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." I will acquaint thee with my request.

While there is hope in a sinner's

case, his mind is often "like the troubled sea, which cannot rest." God in mercy forbids that he should remain at ease in his guilt. He makes him feel the emptiness of the world, he visits him with sore compunctions of conscience, and terrifies him with dark visions of the future. But when a transgressor passes the bounds of hope, and is given up to a reprobate mind, he feels little compunction for his crimes, and remains at ease in the full enjoyment of his guilty pleasures. It is then that we often see "the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. His eyes stand out with fatness, and he has more than heart can wish. Pride compasseth him as a chain; violence covereth him as a garment. Behold, these are the ungodly that prosper in the world: they increase in riches: they are not in trouble like other

men, neither are they plagued like other men." Thus it was with Haman: he was the most unprincipled and wicked man in the whole Persian empire: and yet had he as little compunction of conscience as any man in the whole empire. If he had any sorrow, it was not for his crimes, but because he could not be as wicked as he would.

Flushed with his success, and elated with his honours, he went forth from the banquet that day "*joyful, and with a glad heart.*" On his way he met Mordecai in the king's gate, who "*stood not up*" to reverence him, "*nor moved*" to do him honour.

Haman had probably heard of the deep distress Mordecai had manifested when his murderous edict was published, and doubtless expected, when they should next meet, Morde-

cai would be ready to lick the dust before him. But behold, here he is unmoved as ever. Though he treats him with no positive disrespect, though he does not rail on him as a tyrant and murderer, still he does what galls the pride of Haman more : he shows himself entirely above his favour or his frowns. This was too much for Haman : his malice burned within him. Conceiving it beneath his dignity, however, to play the assassin in public, he “refrained himself,” but went home filled with the dire spirit of revenge. “One private man who despised his greatness and disdained submission, while a whole kingdom trembled before him, one spirit which the utmost stretch of his power could neither subdue, nor humble, blasted his triumphs.”

Unable any longer to conceal his agony, Haman called together his

friends, with Zeresh his wife. He told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and of the honours the king had heaped upon him, and how he had advanced him above all the princes of the realm. He added moreover, "Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself, and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." And what next? what is the conclusion after all this long preamble? "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Haman's friends perceived how willingly he would dispense with his former resolution of delaying the execution of Mordecai until the day determined by lot. They therefore advised him to share a portion of the

pleasure he anticipated in seeing the blood of the whole Jewish nation flow by putting Mordecai to death at once. "Let a gallows be made," said they, "fifty cubits (seventy-five feet) high, and to-morrow speak thou to the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon. Then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet." This advice "*pleased Haman.*" The anticipation of speedy revenge gave him more pleasure than all his power, riches, and honours. Not doubting that the king, who had granted him an edict for the destruction of the whole Jewish nation, would readily give Mordecai into his hands, he gave orders forthwith for the erection of his gallows.

The instrument for Mordecai's destruction being prepared, Haman retired to rest, pleased at the thought

of seeing his victim struggling in the agonies of death the next day, and then of going in merrily with the king to the banquet.

CHAPTER VII.

Haman goes to sleep, anticipating the luxury of revenge in the morning, but God wakes the king to blast his schemes—The court journal read to the king—A chapter on Mordecai's services—Morning breaks, and Haman comes to procure an order for Mordecai's execution—A disappointment—Haman playing the groom for Mordecai—Reflections—Haman goes home mourning—A second council—Miserable comforters—The king's officers come to hasten Haman to the banquet.

THE wicked sleep, but God wakes. While Haman enjoys the luxury of his golden dreams, Providence in quiet and easy majesty is moving events onward to their wise and benevolent consummation. The commencement is with the monarch. Ahasuerus had retired from the ban-

quiet ; the curtains of evening were drawn, and the silence of night invited to repose. But the king could not rest. Sleep, gentle sleep, had fled from his downy couch, and wakeful visions played around him. Influenced perhaps by no higher motive than a desire for amusement, or else perchance disturbed by conscience with the idea that some faithful subject, some meritorious deed, had been left unrewarded, the king called for "the book of records," in which the occurrences of each day were noted down.

The secretary opened the volume, and read the account of a plot against the life of the king by Bigthan and Teresh, and of its discovery by Mordecai. Ahasuerus inquired, "What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this ?" . Ah, indeed ! What honour ? What dignity ?

The honour and dignity of being sold to destruction, together with his whole nation—of being sacrificed to gratify the blood-thirsty spirit of a man who would probably have taken the life of Ahasuerus as readily as that of Mordecai, if he could have advanced his own interests by such a deed.

The convenient memory of Pharoah's butler waked up when he could turn Joseph's skill in interpreting dreams to his own account. And so this courtier, who probably had concerned himself very little about Mordecai's reward, or even about the impending danger hanging over his head, found it quite convenient to remember Mordecai now that he saw the monarch's slumbering conscience awaking. He replied, "There is nothing done for him."

Morning had now thrown its mel-

low light into the palace, and the sound of footsteps was heard in the court. The king inquired, "Who is in the court?" The servants replied, "Behold, Haman standeth in the court." His impatience to see Mordecai upon the gallows had urged him thus early to the palace, and he waited with anxiety to present his request to the king. "Let him come in," said the monarch. A very favourable reception for Haman—the king is alone and disengaged. Haman is about to speak, but the king breaks silence. "What," says he, "shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Haman pauses. Mark that perturbation upon his countenance. It is the index of what is passing within. Two of the master passions of his soul, vanity and revenge, are struggling for the ascendancy. Methinks I can read

his very thoughts. "The man whom the king delighteth to honour! And who can that be? Ah, who indeed but his prime minister, his special favourite, myself: well, honour never comes amiss to me. But I wish the king had said nothing about it just now, for I can enjoy neither honour nor any thing else till I have my revenge on that insolent Jew. But I must smother my malice a little longer, and answer the king's question. And now, seeing that I am to provide honours for myself, I will prescribe liberally." And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown-royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of

one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

The countenance of Ahasuerus testifies his approbation of this advice, and Haman waits to hear his own name announced as the man "whom the king delighteth to honour." Harken, the king speaks! "Make haste, Haman, and take the apparel and the horse as thou hast said, and do even so to MORDECAI THE JEW, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken."

What is the matter, Haman? Have you trod upon a serpent unawares? See him as he passes out at the

king's gate. Did ever man look so meanly before? See him approach Mordecai. He has no spirit left: he cannot meet a single glance of Mordecai's eye. But he can hold the stirrup, and lead the horse for him through the city of Shushan. "Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

We cannot suppose that this parade, considered merely in itself, was pleasing to Mordecai. He had not been accustomed to indulge in a passion for applause, and had sense enough to estimate such an idle pageant at its true value. But viewed in connection with the present circumstances, it must have given him satisfaction. To

see that his services were remembered by the king at this important crisis, and to behold the man who was seeking his life thus humbled, were circumstances calculated to encourage his heart and strengthen his faith.

The parade was now over, and Mordecai very gladly resigned his robes of royalty, and cheerfully returned to the king's gate. "But Haman hasted to his house, mourning and having his head covered."

Weak heads become giddy upon any sudden elevation. Had Mordecai been only an ordinary man, he would have shown his weakness on this occasion. He would probably have seized upon the moment when both the courtiers and the populace were uniting to do him honour as a favourable one to turn the tide against Haman. He would have entered the

palace, told the king of his services, reproached his enemy, and asked the repeal of the bloody edict. But this premature course would quite likely have proved fatal to the cause he wished to promote. It is equally dangerous to *anticipate* Providence, and to refuse to fall in with its designs when our way is fairly open for action. Mordecai chose that events should move on in the order already begun, and therefore returned quietly to attend on the king's business.

But look on the other hand. What a contrast between him and Haman! A mean spirit can neither bear honour nor rebuke. Haman has been elevated, and we behold him insufferably vain and arrogant. He has now met with a little abasement, and we see a meanness of spirit deserving nothing but contempt. Had he been a man of truly noble bearing, such an event

would have been far from disturbing his quiet. He would have regarded it as both a pleasure and an honour to be selected as "one of the king's MOST NOBLE PRINCES" to do honour to a man who had saved the life of his king. But there was nothing of this true greatness of soul about Haman. He went home covered with confusion, stung with envy, and mourning as under the bitterest affliction.

Unable to sustain himself with the spirit of a man, he called together his wife and friends, and sought relief in unbosoming to them his griefs. But the wicked are usually most miserable comforters. The infidel Hume by his sophistry induced his mother to renounce Christianity; but on her death-bed she wrote him a letter telling him she found herself hopeless and comfortless, and requesting from

him those consolations which, alas! his dark and cheerless skepticism could not give. Voltaire during his last illness was so far from finding comfort in the society of his infidel associates, that he cursed them as his greatest tormentors. So it was with Haman's friends. They had been ready enough to favour his dark schemes when he rode triumphantly the swelling tide of prosperity, but no sooner does the storm begin to gather than he has reason to exclaim, "Miserable comforters are ye all."

It was but the day before that he came in burning with revenge against Mordecai. He then called together the same persons for counsel. And what advice did they give? Did they endeavour to allay his passion? Did they tell him of the impolicy and unreasonableness of his conduct? No: they fomented his anger and sharp-

ened his appetite for revenge. But now his tempters turn his tormentors : they thrust daggers into his wounds. "Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."

So remarkable had been God's providences in favour of the Jews that even their heathen neighbours had often been forced to see and confess them. Thus the privy council of Haman begin to see and predict that no weapon formed against God's people can prosper.

Scarcely had this ominous prediction been uttered before the king's chamberlains came to hasten Haman to the banquet. He goes, but not quite so "MERRILY" as he had anticipated in the morning.

CHAPTER IX.

The king and Haman arrive at the banquet—Ahasuerus begins to be impatient to know the nature of the queen's petition—A scene of thrilling interest—Wrath of the king—Haman's mean spirit and cowardice—Hanged on the gibbet prepared for Mordecai—Retributive providence.

WITHOUT any time to recover his composure, or frame any new devices for sustaining his falling fortunes, Haman was hurried away to the banquet. With forced smiles, which concealed a heavy heart, he is seated by the side of the monarch and his royal spouse. Here are the three sitting at the table together, but how different are their thoughts. Leaving Haman, of whose inward perturbations we can easily form an idea, we may turn to Ahasuerus. The queen has ventured into his presence at the peril of her life to offer some petition. He has encouraged her to prefer it at

once, but she has only said, "Let the king and Haman come to the banquet." They have attended, and again he has desired her to make known her request, but she delays, and invites them to a second banquet. "What can it be? What is her desire? What mean those tender, imploring glances? What is that in her looks which seems so beseechingly to implore my protection?" The king begins to feel a most irrepressible anxiety to know the secret. He, therefore, again urges her to make known her request, repeating the assurance, "It shall be granted thee, it shall be performed even to the half of the kingdom." "Then Esther the queen answered, and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, LET MY LIFE BE GIVEN ME AT MY PETITION AND MY PEOPLE AT MY REQUEST." With what

astonishment must this speech have filled the mind of the king! "Let my life be given me! And is the wife of my bosom, the queen of the empire, before me supplicating for her life?" The queen proceeds:—"For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish; but if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage."* With mingled emotions of surprise, anxiety, and indignation, the king eagerly inquired, "Who is he? and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?" He wonders where a miscreant can be found sufficiently vile, or a desperado sufficiently bold to

* Esther means that Haman was not a man of so much consequence as to countervail the infamy which would fall on the king, and the loss which his kingdom would sustain by the sacrifice of a whole nation to his resentment.—*Coke.*

attempt such a thing. Pointing to the prime minister, the queen replies, "THE ADVERSARY AND ENEMY IS THIS WICKED HAMAN." Here he is, let him answer for himself, for therefore was he invited. No wonder the blood retreats from Haman's cheeks ; that his lip quivers, and the bands of his loins are loosed, so that his knees smite together. Cruelty and cowardice are twin brothers, and Haman is as conspicuous for the one as for the other. Arising from the banquet in his wrath, and without uttering a word, the king hastily retired into the palace garden. This he did to cool and allay his troubled and inflamed spirits, to consider what was proper to be done, and we would hope to lament his own credulity in giving up a whole nation to the will of an unworthy favourite.

Haman in the mean time saw that dangers were gathering thick and fast

around him. In the fierceness of the king's countenance, in the agitation of his frame, he read, and in his own conscious guilt he felt, the presages of his doom. Cowardly and mean-spirited in his adversity, as he had been haughty and imperious in his prosperity, instead of preparing to meet his fate like a man, he first "stood up to make request for his life to the queen," and then threw himself prostrate at her feet on the sofa or couch on which, according to the Persian custom, she reclined. What a change is here! Behold the man who could be satisfied with nothing less than the utter extermination of the whole Jewish nation prostrate and suing for life at the feet of a Jewess. See the man who has just been erecting a gallows for Mordecai imploring protection from Mordecai's foster daughter.

While Haman was in this position the king came in. His whole aspect showed that he was burning with indignation at the man whom he had raised from the dust, loaded with honours, and advanced above all the princes of the realm; but who had abused his confidence, brought odium upon his benefactor, obtained a decree for the extermination of thousands of his innocent subjects, and obliged even his queen to sue for her life. Casting an eye on the prostrate minister, he uttered an expression indicating that he considered no act too base for so vile a miscreant to be guilty of. "As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face." Covering the face of condemned criminals was the custom in eastern countries, and the officers of Ahasuerus had already interpreted their master's will concerning Haman.

Harbonah, the chamberlain, who had been sent to attend him to the banquet, now turns his accuser, and tells what he had seen in the court of his house: "Behold also the gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman." "*Let him be hanged thereon,*" said the king. The sentence was speedily executed. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai."

We see here a most remarkable retributive providence. "In the first place, Haman had procured a decree for the destruction of the Jews without any proof of their guilt, or even any investigation of their conduct, and now he is ordered to execution by the arbitrary will of the prince, without even the form of a trial. Secondly, he is hanged on the very gibbet which

he had erected for Mordecai." Thus are the wicked snared in the work of their own hands. Though this is not the world of retribution, and though "the ungodly often prosper in the world" until "their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart could wish," though it is often true that "they are not plagued like other men, and there are no bands in their death," yet to show the world that He has a government going forward toward a final consummation, God *sometimes* holds men up as beacons to warn others of their danger. In doing this he frequently selects such monsters of iniquity as Haman. He allows them to frame schemes of gigantic wickedness and fiendish cruelty. With canvass spread and prosperous gales, they sail on the sunny sea of prosperity. They rise rapidly toward the pinnacle of power,

and honours are heaped upon them from every quarter. But the giddy height to which He is raising them is only to make their downfall the more conspicuous and instructive. This was the case in the instance before us. Up to the very day of his execution, Haman's career was one of uninterrupted prosperity. Wealth flowed into his coffers. He distanced all his compeers in the pursuit of honour, and the whole Persian empire trembled at his power. But in one single day did his calamity overtake him. The just judgment of God dashed him from his proud eminence, making him A MONUMENT TO ALL SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS OF HIS OWN RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTIONS. Let the innocent commit their cause to God. Though justice may seem for a while to linger, though it may never even come to their succour *in*

this world, yet let them rest assured that in *the end* “IT SHALL BE WELL WITH THE RIGHTEOUS.”

CHAPTER X.

Haman's palace and estate given to Esther—The queen discloses her relationship to Mordecai—Mordecai is made prime minister in place of Haman—The queen again petitions for the repeal of Haman's edict—The king in a sorry predicament—An edict issued allowing the Jews to arm themselves, and stand for their lives.

SEVERAL important matters were now to be disposed of. Haman was dead, but his deeds still lived. There were his palace and the vast estate he had acquired. These were forfeited to the crown, and the king made a present of them to the queen. “The wealth of the sinner” was thus “laid up for the just.” This estate the queen gave into the hands of Mordecai to manage and control for her.

use. How singular that the man who was to have been hanged in the court of Haman's palace should take possession of that same palace on the very same week!

The time had now come for the queen to disclose her relationship to Mordecai. With much pleasure she informs the king that Mordecai is her near relation; that it was he who took her up a helpless orphan, furnished her an asylum in his own house, adopted her as a daughter, and that to him she is indebted for that training which had made her the choice of Ahasuerus in preference to all the damsels assembled from the different provinces of the empire.

Mordecai is instantly summoned into the royal presence. There he stands—the man who has overthrown a most wicked and dangerous minister and saved the life of both the king

and the queen. And what now “shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?” The monarch takes it upon himself to answer this question. He takes off the ring which he had formerly given to Haman, and presents it to Mordecai, thereby investing him with the office of chief minister of state. Thus while “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall, humility is before honour, and he that humbleth himself is exalted” in due time. We have already remarked that though Haman was dead, his deeds still lived. This is often the case. The tongue and pen of Voltaire have long since ceased to move, but his writings are a legacy of evil, which have corrupted and led to crime and infamy many a deluded young man. The edict for the extermination of the Jews was yet in

force. The enemies of that oppressed people were still looking forward to the day of slaughter and spoils. The queen, therefore, once more entered the inner court of the palace. "And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman, the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews." Ahasuerus again held out the golden sceptre, when "Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamadetha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces, for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come

unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

This affecting scene moved the heart of the king, which indeed must have been already filled with painful recollections and distressing perplexities. "Behold," said he, "I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews." This was as much as to say, You may see by what I have already done my anxiety to prevent the mischievous effects of this bloody edict. "But why not then revoke the edict at once?" Ah! this indeed was the difficulty. Not to say any thing of the unenviable plight into which the monarch must be thrown by repealing, and thus confessing before the whole empire that this decree of unparalleled barbarity

was wholly uncalled for, there was a still more formidable difficulty in the way. In the height of their pride and folly, the Persian monarchs and courtiers had pretended to infallibility in their legislation. And as every enactment was declared to be *perfect*, it was of course to be *immutable*. With superlative arrogance and folly they stamped even the crude fancies which originated in the fumes of wine with the seal of immutability. Thus were injustice and oppression made perpetual and unalterable. Into whatever rash, hasty, or unjust measures the king might be betrayed, he was made the slave of his own absurd pretensions to infallibility. In this wretched predicament was Ahasuerus placed on this occasion. The letters of Haman had been published under the royal sanction, and the monarch with all his absolutism must not re-

voke them. To meet one absurdity, therefore, resort must be had to another. The lives of the Jews must still stand exposed to the peril of the sword, and the only way is to give them authority to arm themselves, and repel force by force. This was the only resort on the present occasion, and the king gave commandment that so it should be. The decree for this purpose was drawn up by Mordecai, and presents a striking contrast to that of Haman. The first was a decree of extermination ; the second was only for defence. Haman attempts to convert the nation into a horde of banditti to fall sword in hand upon the defenceless and unarmed, to take the spoil and the prey ; Mordecai allows an injured people to arm themselves only against those who attack them. It is true, to strike terror into their enemies, the Jews are allowed "to

slay, and cause to perish all the power of the people that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." But this they never did, as the sequel will show. They took no spoil, neither did Mordecai wish they should ; but he found it necessary to counteract Haman's measures by a decree giving the Jews ample powers. The edict having been framed, the king's secretaries were called, and it was translated into the languages of the different nations of which the empire was composed. Letters containing it were stamped with the royal seal, and sent out to all the provinces of the empire. The strongest and swiftest beasts were employed, and "posts were hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment on horses, mules, camels, and young dromedaries."

CHAPTER XI.

Haman during his life time too arrogant to be popular—Great rejoicing at Mordecai's elevation—Special joy of the Jews on the publication of the new edict—A good constitution and a virtuous magistracy invaluable blessings—Our own country—Our dangers—Duty of good citizens.

A SHORT period often brings about great changes. It is but as yesterday when we saw Haman surrounded by bowing and cringing courtiers as he proudly walked out and in at the royal palace. Had we judged only from the smiles with which he was greeted, and the implicit obedience with which he was served, we should have considered him a universal favourite. At the same time we might have seen Mordecai clad in the habiliments of sorrow, with few who dare even speak kindly to him, lest they should incur the frown of Haman. But how oft are appearances decep-

tive! The understandings of men often force them to just conclusions, even when interest and cowardice are leading them to wear a mask, and act a disguised part.

Haman was too arrogant and unprincipled to be beloved. His power and vindictive temper made him an object of dread, but he was too vile a man to be sincerely respected. Mordecai, on the contrary, possessed those qualities of head and heart, and pursued that line of conduct, which COMMANDED respect. We need not be surprised, therefore, that now when as chief minister of state he came out "from the presence of the king in royal apparel, of blue and white, with a great crown of gold,* and with a garment of fine linen and purple, THE CITY OF SHUSHAN REJOICED AND WAS GLAD." "When it goeth well

* Or turban, ornamented with gold.

with the righteous, the city rejoiceth ; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

But if the Persians rejoiced in the great change which had been wrought, what must have been the feelings of the Jews ? A decree had just been published which occasioned among them, in every province, "mourning, fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes." But, behold the change ! Now "the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour, and in every province and in every city whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day." Many also who saw the star of the Jews to be in the ascendant, either to keep on the popular side, or, perhaps, having been

before convinced of the truth of the Jewish religion, but afraid to avow their sentiments, now came out and avowed themselves proselytes to the worship of the true God. What an invaluable blessing is a good constitution administered by wise and virtuous magistrates !

We have in the course of this history seen a vast empire, composed of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, extending from India to Ethiopia. This empire possessed unrivalled advantages of soil and climate, and a most numerous population. Its wealth and magnificence were immense, and its resources most ample. But with all these advantages what security for fortune, life, or liberty had its inhabitants under a government where the lives of a nation were at the mercy of a worthless court favourite ? Look, my dear reader, at

the future before you, and then turn to your own happy country. Have not the *lines fallen to you in pleasant places*, and has not God given you a *goodly heritage*? And now remember you have, or will have, something to do to maintain this goodly heritage. Other nations have enjoyed liberty, but it is gone. Instead of being now ruled by peaceable laws, their every right must be guarded by a wall of bayonets. And how did they lose the precious boon of freedom? The answer to this question is of such unutterable importance that I would I could engrave it in indelible lines upon my reader's heart. Is there anxiety awakened upon this subject? Do you ask with interest, *How* did they lose the precious boon? I answer, **BY THEIR WICKEDNESS.** A corrupt and unprincipled people are only fit for *a nation of slaves*. Being unfit for

freedom, God gives them up to work out their own ruin. *A sound and healthy morality is the only basis of freedom, and sound national morality never did and never can exist without CORRECT RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.* For myself I have no fears for our liberties from invading armies I dread no foreign Alexanders or Napoleons. But I fear VICE and IRRELIGION. I fear political demagogues and unprincipled magistrates. I fear party strifes and political animosities. I fear the man who violates his oath to the constitution by voting for unprincipled men for office, merely because they are of *his party* or *for any other reason*. I fear an editor of a newspaper who is either dishonest or afraid to rebuke the evils of the times. I fear men who are dishonest in their dealings, profane in conversation, and loose in morals. I fear the man who

breaks the sabbath, or disregards the moral training of his children. I fear the man who disseminates irreligion by the tongue, the pen, or the press. I fear the minister of religion who is more afraid of offending his hearers than of displeasing his God. And when I see a company of youth or children who are disobedient to their parents, impudent to their elders, and quarrelsome with each other, and who love to gather about dram shops and gaming places, who either neglect the house of God or behave clownishly while there, I always fear that they will make trouble for themselves and the community. And now I am so certain that if as a nation we ever fall these things will be the cause; the evils I have named will dig the graves of our liberties and entomb our glory; that I request my reader, whether old or young, to go back and read over

the grounds of fear which I have suggested: and if he agrees with me in regarding those things which I have named as great and dangerous evils, I request him to resolve that he will never either be guilty of ANY ONE of them himself, or COUNTENANCE ANY ONE OF THEM in others.

CHAPTER XII.

The decisive day at length arrives—The most desperate among the enemies of the Jews make the attack, but are repulsed with great slaughter—Seventy-five thousand fall—Five hundred are slain in Shushan, and among them Haman's ten sons—A second petition of the queen—Three hundred slain on the following day—Peace restored.

IN the last chapter we left two royal edicts in force. The one allowed the enemies of the Jews to fall upon them on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, sword in hand, and slay men, women, and children,

and take the spoil. The other gave the Jews permission to arm themselves, and stand for their lives, and to destroy, and take the spoil from any that attacked them. As the latter decree did not abrogate the former, it was legal for any man to kill a Jew, and seize upon his estate. Thus "a civil war is proclaimed, two parties in the state are armed against one another, the innocent and the guilty are placed on a level, or rather innocence is perilled on the accidents of war, and authority, instead of interposing for the preservation of public tranquillity, stands by as a passive spectator of the sanguinary struggle. That these things were so was not the fault of Mordecai and Esther," who availed themselves of the only means in their power for defending their kindred from universal massacre.

The decisive day at length arrived. "It might be thought that the declared favour of the king, and the known fact that Mordecai was prime minister, and chief favourite at court, would have effectually deterred any from attacking the Jews, and consequently, that there would be no reason for the shedding of blood. But we find that it was otherwise ; nor is it difficult to account for the fact. The Jews had many enemies among the nations which composed the Persian empire, including those which had been carried captive from the countries bordering on Palestine. The decree of Haman had called forth the ancient and hereditary hatred of such, while it induced others to join them by the prospect of a rich booty which it held out. During the three months which elapsed between this and Morde-

cai's decree there was sufficient time for the hostile feeling to manifest itself. Looking upon the Jews as a devoted people, their enemies would not scruple to declare in every way their intention to revenge upon them their old quarrels, and when once persons have avowed their intentions, and fairly embarked in any cause, however desperate, they are apt to persevere in it with unrelenting obstinacy. The proclamation of Mordecai's decree in proportion as it gladdened the hearts of the victims of their fury, must have thrown a damp on the spirits of those who thirsted for blood and rapine. But it also whetted their revenge by adding to it disappointment, chagrin, and fear. The fall of Haman, and the advancement of Mordecai, instead of convincing them of the folly of their enterprise, served but to exasperate

their minds, and make them more outrageous. They had gone too far to retract. They concluded they had by their threatenings, their taunts, and their injuries, provoked the Jews beyond the hope of forgiveness. They were more numerous and powerful than the objects of their hatred. The contest was to be decided by the sword. Though popular favour was turned for the present toward the Jews, still they could slay, and take the spoil, without being subject to any punishment. And as for the wrath of Mordecai, he held his place by the precarious favour of an arbitrary prince, which he might soon lose. The sudden advancement of a stranger had raised the envy of the proud nobles of Persia, and means might soon be found to take him off. By such considerations they would encourage themselves,

and strengthen their confederacy during the eight months which intervened between the publication of the two edicts."

But vain are the counsels of the wicked when they oppose the providence of God. How were all these expectations blasted when the decisive day arrived! The Jews gathered themselves together in the cities of the various provinces of the empire. This prudent course consolidated their strength, while the thought that they were to fight for their lives, their brethren, their aged parents, their sons, their daughters, their wives, and their houses, together with the consciousness that they were in the right, and that God was for them, gave them a spirit and courage which their assailants could not resist. Besides, their enemies were struck with terror. They fought

in a bad cause. Their consciences, if they had any, must have reproached them. God was evidently against them. They were measuring swords with men who fought in a just cause ; with men who were fighting as fathers and husbands, as sons and brothers ; and they found themselves engaged in an unequal contest. It is also probable, that only the most wicked and desperate actually ventured upon an assault. Many might have boasted largely beforehand who were missing when the time of action arrived. In addition to this, the rulers of the different provinces understanding very well the will of the king, and knowing the queen was a Jewess, and Mordecai prime minister, countenanced the Jews. Victory, therefore, declared on their side. Yet was it not bought without a severe struggle. Their enemies made

“a desperate resistance, as men who in drawing the sword had thrown away the scabbard, and staked their all in the contest. This appears from the number killed, amounting, in all the provinces, to seventy-five thousand.” In this terrible slaughter the Jews were actuated by very different motives from those which governed the assailants. The latter, fired with rancour, made an unprovoked assault upon an innocent people. The former stood to defend their wives and little ones from ruffian violence and cruel death. The assailants came to shed innocent blood for gold and plunder. The defendants utterly refused to lay their hands on the spoil, although a law of the empire confiscated to them the goods and estates of any who should assault them.

At the close of this eventful day,

the number of the slain in Shushan was reported to the king. He immediately reported the result to Esther: "The Jews," said he, "have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request farther? and it shall be done." She requested first, that the bodies of Haman's ten sons should be hanged upon a gallows. "It is not unlikely," says Dr. Dodd, "that many [of his particular favourites] might be enraged at Haman's death. His sons in particular might set themselves at the head of those who were bold enough to attempt the destruction of the Jews at Shushan, being resolved to revenge their father's death. This seems to suggest one

reason why Esther was solicitous to have their bodies hung on the gallows, because they had shown more malice and indignation against the Jews than any others, and on the day when the cruel edict went into effect had made the most desperate attack upon them. The reasons of state in this severity might be to expose the family to greater infamy, and thereby deter other counsellors at any future time from abusing the king with false representations." The second part of Esther's request was, that the Jews might be permitted to continue the battle on the following day. "There is no part of Esther's conduct which warrants us to conclude that she was of a sanguinary disposition, or took pleasure in slaughter." But it is probable that she had been informed by Mordecai, that some of the most implacable enemies

of the Jews had fled from the battle after they saw it was going against them, and were still alive. To entirely break down the dangerous conspiracy against the Jews, and give peace to the empire, she wished an example made of these men in the capital, and to have the news go out into the provinces. Accordingly, the king granted her request, and three hundred more fell on the next day. Tranquillity was now restored to the kingdom. The Jews found themselves honoured and respected, and the whole empire reaped great advantages by a change of men and measures.

CHAPTER XIII.

Results of the preceding events—Effects on the empire—The world interested in this deliverance of the Jews—Improved state of piety among the Jews—Proselytes to the true religion—Security of those who trust in God.

IN pursuing our narrative we have seen a dark and threatening cloud gathering over "God's chosen people." In thick and heavy volumes it arose and overspread the political sky. Fitfully it emitted its angry gleams, which seemed to portend that, surcharged with wrath, it was about to burst in one general and desolating tornado. The tempest did indeed rage; but there was ONE who guided the whirlwind in its course and brought his people safely through. And now what do we behold? What but a serene and purified atmosphere, a cloudless sky, and nature green,

and refreshed, and beautified. It is thus that providence overrules events, and makes them subservient to its own gracious designs. But let us look a little more definitely at this remarkable page in the world's history. The leading fact deserving of consideration is this: That though a chosen instrument of Satan had formed a plot, which for the craft with which it was laid, the magnitude of the mischief it was designed to accomplish, and the success which promised to attend it, has scarcely found a parallel; still, GOD SO OVER- RULED EVENTS, THAT THE ISSUE LEFT EVERY THING IN AN IMPROVED STATE. First, The government of the empire became greatly improved. There was a change both of men and measures. The administration could scarcely have been in worse hands than Haman's, or in better than Mor-

decai's. And when we consider the extent of the empire, the immense number of its subjects, and how much depends on a wise and prudent administration, we shall see that this was a matter of no little consequence. Secondly, This great deliverance which God wrought for his people, was far more extensive in its results than would at first view appear. It was in reality a mercy to the world. Let it be recollected that the decree of Haman embraced the Jews in Palestine as well as elsewhere. Let it also be remembered, that with the Jewish nation was deposited in trust for mankind the true religion. The law and the prophets, the history of the world, and the promises and predictions of the Messiah, were with them. Had Haman's gigantic project prevailed, and all Jews been destroyed, how fearful would have been the

result! The true religion would have been nearly, if not totally exterminated. The prophecies which had announced that the Jews should be preserved as a nation until the coming of the Messiah, would have been falsified. The economy which was to usher in the gospel would have been annihilated, and idolatry and false religion have enjoyed a new triumph. The interposition of Providence was therefore not barely in behalf of the Jews, but in behalf of true religion, or, in other words, in behalf of the world. Thirdly, The true religion was not only saved from extermination, but, we have reason to conclude, was advanced in credit, extent, and purity. The heathen could not help seeing the hand of God in these striking events, and we are expressly told, many of them embraced the Jewish religion. And could the people of

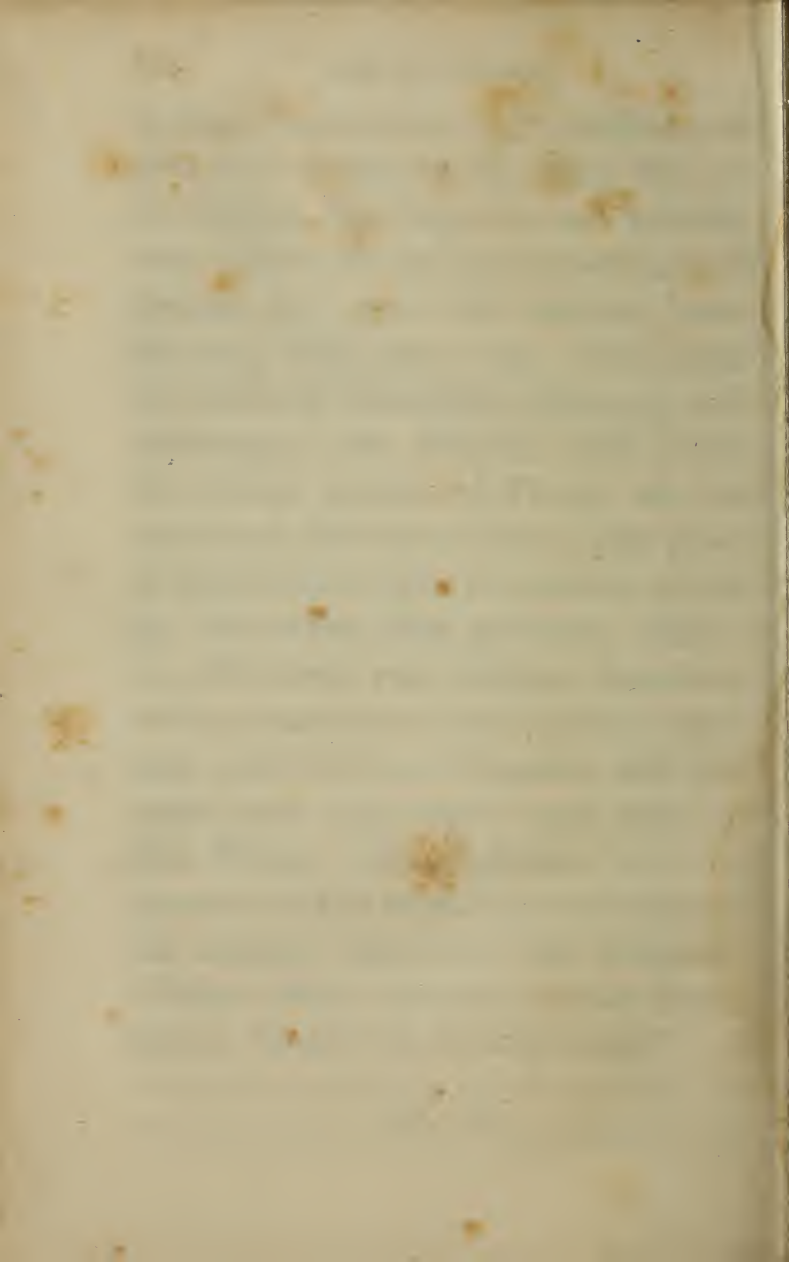
God fail to become more devoted and more grateful. Were not the faith and the zeal of many greatly increased by their great trials and signal deliverance? They instituted an annual festival in commemoration of this event, called the feast of Purim. One of the special acts of this festival was to send portions to one another, and GIFTS TO THE POOR. This last act, at least, indicated that they remembered their obligations to God, and endeavoured to show their gratitude to him by remembering his suffering children.

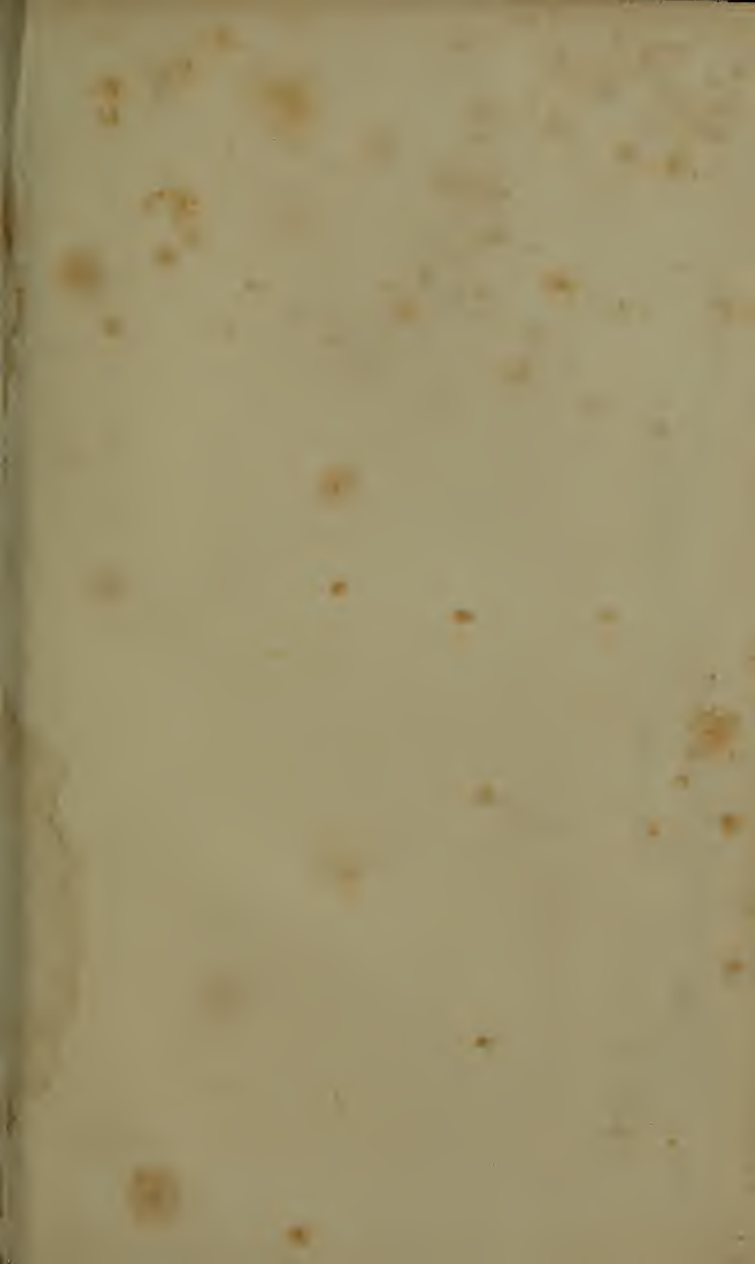
Again, we are taught by this instructive providence the security of those who put their trust in the Lord. Pharaoh and his hosts may advance against Israel, the plain behind them may glitter with the hostile array, the shouts of the pursuers may be appalling to the stoutest hearts; but

God has need of no other instrument than the waters of the Red Sea to overwhelm that host in one general ruin. The fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace may glow with intense heat, but they shall not singe a hair from the heads of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So Haman may have the whole power of Persia at his command, but the whole of that power shall not be able to destroy a single Jew while God protects. Leaving Mordecai and Esther, therefore, in the possession of all earthly blessings, and the Jews in peace and quietude, we may adore and trust in that Being who suffereth not "a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice," and who has declared, "THEY THAT TRUST IN THE LORD SHALL NEVER BE CONFOUNDED."

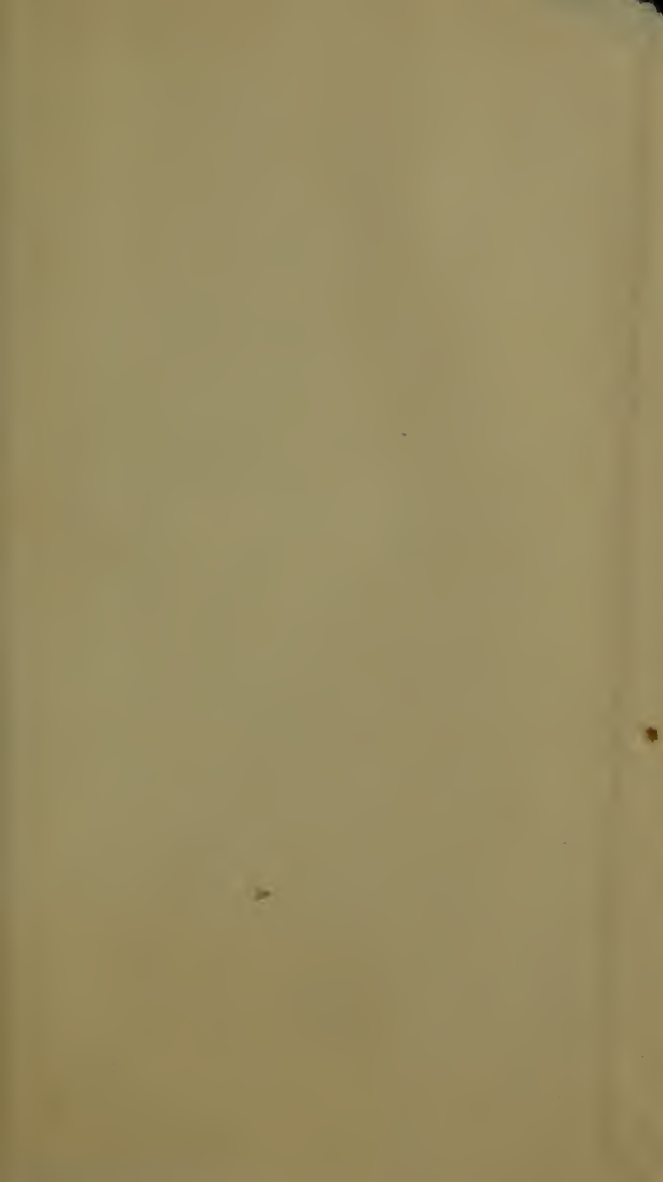
THE END.











Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: May 2005

Preservation Technologies

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 328 365 3

